DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 398 771 HE 029 198

AUTHOR	Seymour, Daniel
TITLE	The AQC Baldrige Report. Lessons Learned by Nine Colleges and Universities Undertaking Self-Study with the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Criteria.
INSTITUTION	American Association for Higher Education, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Apr 95
NOTE	40p.
AVAILABLE FROM	American Association for Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, Suite 360, Washington, DC 20036-1110 ($8 members; $10 non-members).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrator Role; *Awards; Change Strategies; Concept Formation; *Educational Assessment; Educational Environment; Evaluation Criteria; Higher Education; Holistic Approach; Interviews; Leadership Responsibility; Learning Strategies; Models; Motivation Techniques; Professional Recognition; *Quality Control; Resource Allocation; *Self Evaluation (Groups); *Summative Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS	*Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award

ABSTRACT

This report summarized observations of administrators at nine colleges in the Academic Quality Consortium (AQC) who assessed the performance of their institutions using the Malcolm Baldrige criteria as a guideline. These criteria include leadership, information and analysis, strategic planning, human resource development and management, management of process quality, quality and operational results, and customer focus and satisfaction. The nine participants in the AQC project gathered and synthesized information using interviews, brainstorming, the ownership method, and "ownership-brainstorming-integration." The last was the approach by the administrators for developing an award application or full-scale assessment. Participants also gave their views on the three scoring dimensions used in the Baldrige evaluation: approach, deployment, and results. Findings revealed the existence of several challenges and concepts related to the use of the Baldrige criteria. The challenges identified by participants included integrating the assessment activities into one's normal activities, dealing with decentralization, the potential negative impact of a Baldrige award on the environment of higher education, language problems, and quality by design. The major concepts identified included an appreciation for holistic thinking, a "systems" perspective, the importance of campus control over higher education, a methodology for learning, and motivational uses of the Baldrige award. (CK)

ED 398 771

The AQC
Baldrige Report

Lessons Learned

By Nine Colleges and Universities Undertaking Self-Study With the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Criteria

April 1995

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

HE 029 194

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

AAHE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Academic Quality Consortium

A project of the American Association for Higher Education

The AQC
Baldrige Report

Lessons Learned

By Nine Colleges and Universities Undertaking Self-Study With the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Criteria

April 1995

by Daniel Seymour

Academic Quality Consortium

A project of the American Association for Higher Education

About the author:

Daniel Seymour is the president of Q Systems, an education and management consulting firm located in Palm Springs, California. He has held professorships at the College of William and Mary and the University of Rhode Island, where he was also assistant to the president. More recently, he has been a visiting scholar at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute and at Claremont Graduate School.

Dr. Seymour is a senior evaluator for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and the author or editor of fourteen books in business and education, including the best-selling *On Q: Causing Quality in Higher Education* (ACE/Oryx, 1992) and its companion volume, *Once Upon a Campus: Lessons for Improving Quality and Productivity in Higher Education* (ACE/Oryx, 1995). His latest book is the two-volume *High Performing Colleges: The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award as a Framework for Improving American Higher Education* (Prescott, 1995).

This publication is a product of the Academic Quality Consortium (AQC), a project of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) in collaboration with the William C. Norris Institute. The AQC provides higher education institutions implementing CQI with opportunities to work collaboratively and to share results with the wider community. AAHE is a national organization of more than 8,500 individual members dedicated to improving the quality of American higher education. AAHE's members — faculty, administrators, and students from all sectors, as well as policymakers and leaders from foundations, government, and business — believe that higher education should play a more central role in national life and that our institutions can and must become more effective.

© 1995 American Association for Higher Education. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Additional copies of this publication can be purchased from:

American Association for Higher Education
One Dupont Circle, Suite 360
Washington, DC 20036-1110
202/293-6440 x11, fax 293-0073

The text of this publication also is reprinted with permission in *High Performing Colleges: The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award as a Framework for Improving American Higher Education,* published by Prescott Publishing, Inc. (1995).

The Caged Bird

There was once a bird in a cage who had a very beautiful voice but who would sing only at night. A bat who was passing by heard her and asked her why she never sang during the day.

"I used to sing in the daytime," she replied sadly, "but then I was captured. Now I've learned my lesson — it's too dangerous to sing during the day. That's why I sing only at night."

"It's a bit late to be careful now," said the bat. "You should have thought about these things before you were caught."

— Aesop

Reclaiming the Public Trust

With the passage of time, the public is beginning to catch on to our shortcomings. They may not have it quite right — they are often wrong about the facts — but they are right about our priorities, and they do not like what they see.

All across the country they hear about the enterprises of every kind facing competitive challenges and having to pay much closer attention to the quality of everything they do. That is the revolution that is sweeping this country; the public naturally expects us to participate. And a lot of us are not.

— Derek Bok

Contents

I. Introduction

II. Pulling It All Together

III. A Matter of Values

IV. Insights Into the Criteria

V. Keeping Score

VI. Framing the Issue

VII. Tough Challenges and Winning Concepts

VIII. Methodology

IX. Addendum

I. Introduction

Derek Bok has it right. A quality revolution has swept this country. And many different enterprises are paying much closer attention to the quality of everything they do. It is also true — at least as measured by the negative newspaper stories we are enduring — that few people believe that colleges and universities have been caught up in the revolution.

The question might be asked of Bok, "So what happens now? What happens to those many colleges and universities that choose the course of the conscientious objector?" Certainly all of them hope to weather the upheaval. By hunkering down, lowering their profile beneath the parapet, they are willing to chance that life will return to normal after the storm. Maybe it will be a fad. Maybe people will get tired of the rhetoric. Maybe the economy will improve. Then again, maybe none of these things will happen.

When the revolution proves to be the real deal — and we still cling to our conscientious objector status — society at large and its representatives will respond in the only way they can. They will see our nonresponsiveness as resulting from a lack of external control of the profession. And they will do the obvious: try to control the work by more direct supervision, standardization of work processes, or standardization of outputs. For colleges and universities it will feel, increasingly, as though they are operating in a cage — not unlike the one described by Aesop.

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) is a set of values, a framework, and a group of criteria and items that can work as a robust system for performance improvement. It has been a symbol as well as a tool of the quality revolution. Most would say that it has carried out its mission well: it has promoted awareness of quality improvement, it has recognized companies with outstanding quality management, it has encouraged many to use the Award Criteria as a valuable self-assessment, and it has shared information on successful quality strategies.

Can a similar-type award do the same for higher education?

A group of Academic Quality Consortium (AQC) institutions (enumerated in **Methodology**) decided to investigate this question. Beginning in 1993, these institutions forged a loose partnership with the MBNQA office in which they agreed to conduct self-assessments using as a model the 1994 Baldrige Criteria for *business*. This partnership allowed the MBNQA office to review actual case materials in preparation for a recommendation regarding a new award category — *education*. It also enabled the AQC institutions to gain experience with a requirements-driven framework for institutional improvement.

This report summarizes the observations and impressions of those individuals at each of the nine institutions who were most directly involved in the self-assessment efforts.

II. Pulling It All Together

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award contains seven examination criteria. Each criterion, in turn, contains a set of items. The 1994 Award Criteria had 28 examination items (the 1995 Education Pilot contains the same seven criteria and 27 examination items adapted to an educational setting). Interestingly, all 28 item statements begin with either the word "describe" or the word "summarize." Further, within each of the items, there are "areas to address" and most of these statements begin with the word "how." Only one conclusion is possible: responding to the Baldrige is an information-intensive exercise.

Many different methodologies can be used to gather and synthesize information. The participants in the AQC project (listed in the **Methodology** section) relied on four: the first is the interview method; the second, the brainstorming method; the third, the ownership method; and the final one can be referred to as the "ownership-brainstorming-integration" (OBI) method.

The Interview Method

One way to gather and synthesize the information needed to respond to the Baldrige is to rely on one or more individuals to interview others. Several institutions in the project relied heavily or exclusively on this method. The methodology is straightforward: an individual identifies, then interviews, others who have specific knowledge in an area. The resulting information is compiled and organized into a coherent response. In some instances the response is then used to initiate a second round of interviews.

The general conclusion is that using the interview method to write a Baldrige application or self-assessment study is unsatisfactory. The primary reason for this is that the interviewing process — although designed to be less intrusive and less time-consuming — ends up being anything but simple, straightforward, and accurate. At one institution the interviewer went through three different sessions. He asked questions, translated, and organized the information, then presented the results to those he had interviewed. Each time they found the document to be incomplete and offered additional information.

In effect, the interviewing method is neither an efficient nor effective way to compile information about the operations of an institution. As one respondent stated: "The people who are doing the work should really report on the work."

The Brainstorming Method

This approach involves a small group of individuals. They attempt to generate responses to the items by exchanging ideas and information. The individuals at one institution involved in the project proceeded to review the minutes of their quality council meetings. They looked at

the issues that were addressed and the progress that had been made on those issues. Additionally, project reports and annual reports were reviewed.

At those institutions that used the brainstorming approach, once the material was drafted it was usually sent out to a larger group for comment — e.g., a council of deans.

This method is quick. It pulls together a good deal of information in a short period of time. Nonetheless, it hardly qualifies as an exhaustive examination of an institution's operations. The use of brainstorming in this manner is apparently not appropriate for gaining anything other than a cursory understanding of current operations.

The Ownership Method

Perhaps the most straightforward method for gathering and synthesizing information is to assign a criterion or item to a specific person. The category- or item-owner is chosen because of his or her expertise or supervisory responsibilities — e.g., the president might write the leadership criterion (1.0), the chief planning officer would investigate the planning criterion (3.0). Individuals pursue their own information and write their own section.

The obvious benefit of this methodology is embedded in the "ownership." As a respondent noted — "I like the idea of category owners, individuals who really look into things in depth." The problems, however, are twofold. First, there is the obvious problem of a disjointed document. There is little integration of the materials, and the writing styles vary widely. The second problem is bias. One individual, working on his or her own, can easily slant the information in a dramatically different way — that is, being too easy or too hard.

The OBI Method

There seems to be little doubt that the preferable methodology for gathering and analyzing information is one that builds on the strengths of the previous methods and minimizes the weaknesses. For example, while the interview method involves collaboration, the individuals who are most closely involved with the operational aspects of the criterion or items are not directly involved in articulating the response. The brainstorming method, in contrast, is strong on collaborative aspects but often involves people who do not have ownership over specific items. The ownership method tends to introduce a significant amount of bias into the process and often lacks the integration of ideas that naturally results from a more collaborative approach.

The following description illustrates how ownership, brainstorming, and integration work together:

We collected information for two weeks — from independent teams, from different work

areas, from our quality research person — and assembled what we lovingly came to refer to as "the mess." We then began actually writing. It was done by members of the quality steering team, the senior leadership of the university. Each person had a responsibility for writing and as a reader — you write yourself and you read for someone else. We aligned pieces with responsibility. The president wrote the leadership section, for example, and the readers ensured that we were of "the same voice." It worked well.

Analysis

There are a number of observations that can be made based upon this material. While the OBI method is clearly the most preferred approach, that does not mean that the other methods are without value. For example, the OBI method might be used in a given year to generate a baseline assessment or apply for an award. It would probably be of marginal value — given the time and energy required — to repeat the process each and every year. On the other hand, an ownership method might be appropriate under some circumstances; for example, specific individuals could update the information within "their" criterion and check for improvements. Another scenario might be to employ a brainstorming methodology to search for ways of responding to a feedback report or to use an interview approach to improve the process of "pulling it together." Also, any of these methods might be used to familiarize a group with the Baldrige process and obtain a rough draft that can be refined the next year using the OBI method.

The key point is that while the OBI method is the best approach for developing an award application or full-scale assessment, it is an extraordinarily difficult and time-consuming effort. It must be used with caution if one is to avoid the dreaded "assessment burnout." ◇

III. A Matter of Values

In introducing the core values and concepts, the 1994 Baldrige Award Criteria booklet states: "The Award Criteria are built upon a set of core values and concepts. These values and concepts are the foundation for integrating the overall customer and company operational performance requirements." While the articulation of values is a useful way to identify and describe what is important to an organization, it follows that not all values will be equally weighted nor will any list of values equally fit the cultures of different organizations. This is especially true when extending the Baldrige to health care and educational organizations. Indeed, the fit and impact of the Baldrige values, as currently described, constitute wide-ranging problems and opportunities for colleges and universities.

The matrix on the opposite page is bordered by these two dimensions — fit and impact. The *fit* dimension is a measure of cultural congruence. It answers the question, "How well does the core value fit with the culture of higher education?" *Impact* is an importance measure. It answers the question, "How important is the core value to the effective and efficient operations of a college or university?"

Based upon the interviews, each of the core values was assigned to a cell. Additional attention is devoted to values that fall into four specific cells. Those values that can be characterized as high impact and medium or high fit are opportunities. Efforts in strengthening these areas yield substantial payoffs. Those values that can be characterized as low fit and medium or high impact are problems. It follows that investment in these areas are difficult but the return on that investment can be tremendous — in effect, work in these areas is an exercise in converting problems to opportunities.

Problems

Employee Participation and Development

There is an interesting dichotomy involving this value, best expressed by the following quotation — "This is an area that I *think* we *think* we do well." The respondent who said this went on to explain that, "We think that because we 'committee this' and 'committee that we are highly participative. But when you look at the divisions between the administrators and the disciplines, and then the nature of the decisionmaking, real participation in substantial change is minimal." The same might be said for development. Many institutions might feel that they do well here. But, according to some respondents, the extent of professional development efforts on a college campus usually begins and ends with sending professors to conferences.

The real difficulty seems to be that while we think we value employee participation and development, the fact remains that much of what is entailed in this concept does not fit with the culture of higher education. As an example, several respondents pointed specifically to the

Core Value and Concepts Analysis

"Impact"	"Fit": low	"Fit": medium	"Fit": high
low	• corporate responsibility and citizenship		
med	—problem— • employee participation and development • fast response	• long-range outlook	
high	—problem— • customer-driven quality • continuous improvement	—opportunity— • leadership • design quality and prevention • partnership development	—opportunity— • management by fact

reaction among faculty members to organized efforts to improve the practice of teaching. This faculty mindset was stated succinctly as: "Who are you to tell me what to do?" On the staff side, the rewards are not there. Education and training is not seen to be part of the expectation: to grow and develop in your professional life. Consequently, most professional development is perceived as extra — something that you do in addition to your normal work. Interpreted as such, development is perceived by the recipients not as an investment in them by the institution but as an added chore to be endured.

Employee participation and development is an opportunity because we consider ourselves to be institutions of higher learning — we preach learning, we sell learning as a service, but as organizations we don't practice it. The payoff in terms of employee morale and added skills to respond to changing customer needs could be tremendous, if we can change the perception of employee participation and development.

Problem: How do we promote employee participation and development as an investment, not an expense?

Fast Response

According to this Baldrige value, response time improvements often drive simultaneous improvements in organization, quality, and productivity. While the logic of this statement might hold true — and the goal of improvement widely accepted — the idea that doing things faster is something to be valued is foreign to higher education. Indeed, one

interviewee began by saying: "Fast response is an alien concept." He then explained that, "People here like to discuss things for a long time. And they honestly believe that a slower process will yield a higher quality outcome."

The real "fit" problem seems to center around the universality of the concept as it is presented in the Baldrige. A number of respondents spoke to this issue:

> *The worrisome part is the notion that faster is always better. If I have a problem, it is with this. There is and should be a time for personal and professional reflection.*

> *It makes sense that a student in the classroom has a right to timely feedback on his or her work so that they can set on-going goals for continuing development. On the other hand, to say that the goal is always fast response, might not capture the complexity of that learning.*

In spite of these serious misgivings, there were also some valuable points made about the impact that fast response — if it was a deeply held value — might make on the performance of a college or university. As an example, "When I think of fast response I think of bringing new curriculum on-line, I think of revising the old, as well." This same point was emphasized by another respondent: "We certainly should be thinking about curriculum design; instead of getting bogged down in committees, a goal would be to respond to student needs, the changing needs of employers and the marketplace, and so on, much faster." Another area that was mentioned involved teaching methods: "We need to think about changing teaching methods to match new ways of student learning. We have a whole generation of computer geeks coming up. How are we going to respond to their needs?"

Problem: How do we pursue the notion of fast response in certain areas, while still emphasizing the reflective practices in others?

Customer-Driven Quality

The fit issue is largely a language one — and a significant one. "[Customer-driven language] certainly was a problem with the professors," is how one respondent put it. She went on to add: "It was a terrible battle. The connotation of 'those we serve' is what's important and what is so difficult. Our faculty did not see themselves that way. They were dispensers of wisdom." A similar sentiment was expressed by another respondent when he was asked to explain why there was resistance to the term and the idea behind it. He said, "The notion is that these young people don't really know what they want, can't know what they want, so how can they tell us? But saying they are 'customers' puts them in charge."

The problem is great. Between the cultural imprint of "the customer is always right," with its obvious power connotations, and the incentive system in higher education, which

encourages independent, entrepreneurial thinking, customer-driven quality is not a widely held value on college campuses.

The impact measure is different, however. The concept of customer-driven quality has proven to be a remarkably powerful device in industry for focusing the attention and efforts of disparate parts of a firm on a common aim. Higher education has equal, if not greater, problems in trying to identify a limited number of focal points that can drive the design of efficient and effective work processes. Our disciplinary structure and organizational divisions create barriers within which the occupants see themselves and their supervisors as the customers — not the next person in line or the end user. The result is tremendous waste: duplication of efforts, needless complexity, and high overhead.

Customer-driven quality, then, is a value that has low fit and high impact on a college campus. It is a problem that, properly dealt with, is a tremendous opportunity for our institutions. A strong customer focus can lead to greater morale, as people work together to achieve a common goal; greater productivity, as waste is reduced; and greater effectiveness, as the institution begins to deliver customer-pleasing services.

Problem: How do we minimize the language difficulties that swirl around the word "customer," while aggressively pursuing the concept of *customer*?

Continuous Improvement

This value states that the notion of continuous improvement must be embedded in the way the organization functions; in effect, there must be a culture that thrives on discontent and that operationalizes that discontent with regular cycles of planning, execution, and evaluation.

Such a value represents a real "fit" problem for higher education. Simply put, "too many people see the Baldrige as an accreditation exercise — you do it once and you're done." This same feeling was expressed over and over again in the interviews. As an example: "We go through the North Central accreditation process and say how great we are. That is not a reflective process; it is not going to help us get better, but that is how people think." Another respondent went so far as to say, "The biggest problem I see in our culture is how to get [the Baldrige] into a cycle of continuous improvement."

In addition to the difficulty that results from such culture-defining practices as program review and accreditation, there is also the issue of service mentality. Some areas of a college or university come by this mentality more naturally — e.g., education, business, nursing. A number of interviewees, however, made a point of noting how unresponsive other areas of their institutions (e.g., arts and sciences) were to the concept and practice of continuous improvement.

But while there was ample evidence to suggest that continuous improvement does not fit well with higher education, there were effusive remarks regarding its potential effects on the performance of higher education. Here are several:

We have an 80% retention rate. That's great. We pat ourselves on the back. But the Baldrige asks you what's the process and what you are doing to improve the process. And what are your trends. Well, that's a different question. You can't pat yourself on the back if you have a flat trend and aren't doing something to improve the process.

The value of a continuous improvement mindset is that you get a baseline, you get feedback, you incorporate feedback that you build on, and then you do it again. And that's how, in an overarching way, you improve your overall system.

Problem: How do we overcome the idea that quality is not a static threshold (i.e., meeting an accreditation standard) but a race with no finish line?

Opportunities

Leadership

The leadership value represents a significant opportunity for those institutions that are truly interested in improving performance. In the Baldrige Award Criteria Framework, leadership is the first element — the driver of the system. The exact language is: "Senior executive leadership creates the values, goals, and systems, and guides the sustained pursuit of customer value and company performance improvement." There is no reason to think that effective leadership would not play a similarly crucial role in improving performance on college and university campuses. Indeed, one interviewee said quite forcefully, "If we were asked what is the prime variable that moves quality, we would say 'leadership in a dean.'" While confirming the importance of leadership as the driver of the system, this response also points to the difficulty with "fit."

Leadership in a loosely coupled system can come from many different places (including deans) — hence, the opportunity. As several respondents pointed out, the Baldrige assumes a somewhat hierarchical structure, with its many references to "senior" leadership. In higher education, a dean, a director, a senior faculty member, or the chair of the faculty senate can all exert forceful, transformational leadership. The unique opportunity, then, is to identify who the leaders are — not by title, as is often done in industry, but by their willingness and ability to manifest leadership qualities.

Opportunity: Extend and reinforce the notion of leadership beyond senior administration in higher education.

Design Quality and Prevention

This value emphasizes the prevention of waste by designing systems and processes that are error free and robust. On the surface, such a value should fit well with the culture on

a college campus. All of us feel that fighting fires and crisis management is a less preferable option than doing things right the first time. Nonetheless, there are two "fit" issues that were mentioned in the interviews. One involves our old nemesis — language. "Design," at least to some people, has a mechanistic slant. It smacks of "bizspeak." Some campus practitioners might even go so far as to suggest that the interaction between a professor and student can't be designed. It is spontaneous. It evolves from a shared emphasis on inquiry and is fraught with imperfections, blind alleys, and intellectual puzzles that defy planning.

The second issue is more subtle. Educators view their environment as being more static than their counterparts in the world of industry. As a result, there is less emphasis on the creation of robust, fault-tolerant processes. An English professor does not perceive his or her work from the same design perspective as a mechanical engineer working in industry does.

An example of the kind of impact that attention to design quality and prevention might have in the higher education environment was provided by one respondent. He said: "We have looked into what is called here the 'death spiral,' a series of introductory math and science courses that most of our majors have to take. There was incredible attrition." The problem, as he described it, was that the curriculum — as a holistic set of courses — was never designed. He added: "So, we have tried to do revisions in those courses to make success much more possible. It's a matter of being serious about *designing* the learning experience."

Opportunity: Develop a design protocol for all areas of the institution — teach it, reinforce it, expect it.

Partnership Development

The Baldrige is very clear about this value — "Companies should seek to build internal and external partnerships to better accomplish their overall goals." In effect, this constitutes an exercise in barrier busting. Within the organization there needs to be an emphasis on cross-functional collaboration; and that emphasis should extend to partnerships with customers and suppliers. How does such a value fit with the culture of a college or university? The answer is "so-so." The development of external partnerships appears to be very much a function of institutional type. Community colleges, professional schools, and land-grant universities have a strong tradition in this area. Respondent statements reinforce this idea:

> *We have a strong history. Engineers have always been "of the world." We aren't afraid.*
>
> *This is real match for us. We've had to rely on partnerships to improve. It's part of our culture.*
>
> *It's the nature of our enterprise. We have advisory boards for each program and a community board, which is our board of trustees.*

There are some problems, however. One individual made a statement that raises valid concerns. She said: "Some faculty members get anxious here. They think that corporate America is going to start dictating the kind of research that occurs or the kind of content that is taught in their courses." The implication is that partnering is a territorial threat. Absolute control is jeopardized when power is shared. The other problem involves the unwillingness or inability to promote collaboration within the institution. We discourage collaboration on college campuses. We are organized along disciplinary lines that exhibit hard edges and strict membership rules. And we reward independence — the solitary researcher, the entrepreneur, the sole author.

In general, respondents felt that efforts to improve collaboration on college or university campuses could yield significant impact. Increased communication across barriers would work to overcome the negative effects that are typically associated with closed systems. It would help to reverse the mindset that, as one respondent mentioned, ". . . advances our self-perception as being different, special, even sacrosanct." And it would enable us to take advantage of new ideas and technologies.

Opportunity: Instill the notion that collaborative efforts are a quid pro quo; and that what we will get is far more valuable than what we give up.

Management by Fact

There is a high degree of fit between "management by fact" as an organizational value and the culture of higher education. That is not to say that we have internalized the value on our campuses. We have not. Nonetheless, we see ourselves as rational decisionmakers and have a deep and abiding respect for the scientific method, with its emphasis on observable measures. One respondent expressed this dichotomy quite well when she said, "That's a tough one. It makes perfect sense, but we continue to struggle to measure what we do." Interestingly, she went on to comment that, while difficult, success was not totally elusive: "We have gotten to the point where some of our professors, when asked 'How do you know if you have taught that material successfully?' can actually tell you."

The impact part of the equation also receives high marks according to the respondents. The general feeling was that we simply don't do it very well. We seem to miss the mark in several ways. First, there is the difficulty of generating the right kind of data — "Universities are good at talking about the process (approach) but not so good at talking about measures that would tell them whether they are successful. That data escapes us." In addition, several people emphasized that most of our data was inside-out: measures that were generated to satisfy external accountability demands, not internal information that is gathered and used to improve systems and processes. Second, there is the issue of implementation. As one respondent noted: "It is not clear to me that we use the information that we do have to manage the institution." The implication is that the practice of problem solving on a college campus is

such that we simply do not use information to reduce uncertainty. We practice decisionmaking-by-anecdote.

With high fit and high impact, management by fact is a value that represents tremendous opportunity for higher education. It is also a value that needs to be nurtured.

Opportunity: Become more mindful of improvement information versus accountability information; and develop more rigorous problem-solving methodologies such that improvement information is used regularly.

Neutral

Corporate Responsibility and Citizenship

This value has, according to respondents, a low level of fit within the culture of higher education. By our very nature we have a special relationship — and, consequently, a special mission — with society. But beyond that, much of what this value speaks to has a heavy business slant. The precise wording in the Baldrige is, "Corporate responsibility refers to the basic expectations of the company — business ethics and protection of public health, public safety, and the environment." While colleges and universities are limited in their fiscal ability to influence and enhance such areas as "environmental excellence," this value does correspond to various waste-saving efforts such as recycling and energy-reduction plans.

While there was little, if any, direct references by respondents to the impact that increased attention to this value would have for higher education, there does seem to be one obvious connection. Our ability to improve our performance in the development of knowledge will have a significant effect on society. No where will that impact be greater than in the areas of undergraduate education and applied research.

Long-Range Outlook

This value is described as follows: "Achieving quality and market leadership requires a company to have a strong future orientation and a willingness to make long-term commitments to all stakeholders — customers, employees, suppliers, stockholders, the public, and the community." At first blush there would seem to be a one-to-one fit between this Baldrige value and the higher education community; there are certainly no language problems or conceptual disagreements. And there are institutions that have a particular gift for steering a clear course toward a destination. One respondent described his institution as follows: "We have done this fairly well, largely because we are clear about what we do. We have a constancy of purpose that other schools, such as comprehensive institutions, do not have."

In spite of the obvious appeal of a long-range outlook, many college and universities operate in a short-run, reactive fashion. One explanation for such a day-to-day approach to the management of our institutions involves budgeting — at least with the publics. The following

statement is illustrative: "[A long-range outlook] is critical. But we get waylaid by short-term thinking. We are enrollment driven, reimbursed by headcount. Our capital budgets are cyclical at best, unpredictable at worst." A similar problem is faced by privates that don't have large endowments. Another explanation is decidedly more vague but at the same time more generalizable across institutions. Colleges and universities are, as one respondent described, "backward looking." Our emphasis on tradition and as a repository of knowledge results in an inherently conservationist approach to work.

The impact that a long-range outlook would have on the operations of a college or university would be moderate. As one of society's institutions, we do tend to lag behind — and that is not all bad. Our purpose is not to extend technological innovation or to anticipate consumers' wants and needs. Instead, part of our responsibility to society is to reflect on what is good, capture the legacy of that goodness, and pass it along to the next generation. Instead of attempting to peer out into the future, we — more than most of society's institutions — need to look into our rearview mirrors to see where we have already been.

IV. Insights Into the Criteria

The respondents in the study were asked to reflect on the criterion(a) they examined on their campus. The following are quotations that provide unique insight into the Criteria:

1.0 Leadership

The problem we had was, "How do you define leadership in an academic institution?" That leadership occurs in different places and at different levels. Is leadership the faculty senate? Is leadership the council of academic deans? Is it the quality council? Is it the president's central management group?

2.0 Information and Analysis

In some ways, I see this criterion as the key. The Baldrige is so data intensive. If it only causes an institution to internally strive toward trying to identify some performance indicators — and then cause administrators to look behind those numbers for improvement — the Baldrige will contribute greatly to higher education.

3.0 Strategic Planning

The insight that we gained is that we do strategic planning, but we don't do strategic quality planning. The difference is that when we started to respond to the questions, for example, "describe the company's business planning process for customer satisfaction, leadership, and overall performance improvement," not much of our planning effort was related to meeting customer needs or even defined in those terms. Most of our planning involves forecasting areas of growth and the budget allocation process. It has little to do with customer requirements.

4.0 Human Resource Development and Management

I was surprised by — given that we talk so much about being student focused and learning — how seldom that came up in the discussion of human resources. It bothered me that what is so central to what the institution is about, doesn't come through when you are talking about the people who are making it happen.

5.0 Management of Process Quality

This criterion was a problem for us. It is at the heart of what the institution does — its

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

core process. But it was very difficult to translate the items as they are written, to make them understandable and meaningful as they relate to the curriculum. The point value is wrong and the wording is a challenge. I came away saying, "There's a trick here and I'm just not getting it."

6.0 Quality and Operational Results

It is sad, really. As an institution you think you know where you have been and where you are going. But when you work through 6.0 you realize how little you really know. The only things we measure, have trend data, and benchmark are the easy pickings — the U.S. News Best College *stuff — and none of that involves key performance indicators.*

7.0 Customer Focus and Satisfaction

I think what we would say, on the educational side, is that increased student learning is the driving force behind our quality efforts. The judgment of that learning ultimately does rest with the student. But "ultimately" is key because we know that learning takes time, and that over time the learner becomes a more informed consumer. There has to be partnership between learners, peers, and instructors on the educational side.

There were also a number of cross-criteria insights that are worth mentioning. First, there is the issue of the complexity of the Criteria. A number of references were made to the amount of time and energy invested in trying to (1) understand the meaning of a criterion (and its related items), as well as the effort put into sorting information. For example, it was stated: "You shouldn't have to translate so much. You don't get that much out of doing the translation. Once you've done the translation and then say, 'What does this mean?' some of that is very productive because it forces you to think about things you haven't thought about before in an educational setting. But only *some* of it." In addition to the translation issue, the sorting issue was expressed as follows: "A lot of time can be spent sorting out what fits where." One respondent went on to offer a solution — "We sat down ahead of time and said, here are our basic processes, products, and services. These relate to 5.1 and these to 6.2. We did it ahead of time so that people wouldn't be so confused in terms of what their job was."

A second major insight that emerges from a cross-criteria perspective involves the difficulty in balancing a wide-angled systems view with a narrow-angled process view. As an illustration, one respondent expressed the frustration she had with the notion of "improving student learning." She said, "It's just that when you follow the Baldrige Framework you can really lose sight of [student learning] because you are so focused on the system — and the

interrelationships." The struggle, it would seem, is a classic forest-for-the-trees conundrum. Another respondent expressed similar frustrations:

> *When going through a particular category, I found it frustrating to try and respond to the "areas to address." There was always the sense that I answered all the questions but I haven't really captured what's unique or what's at the heart of this institution. One the other hand, if you don't respond to the specifics and, instead, try to capture the essence of the institution, you seem not to address all the areas and so there are major holes in the write-up of the category.*

V. Keeping Score

The respondents were also asked their views on the scoring dimensions used in the Baldrige. The scoring dimensions being:

- Approach — refers to "how the applicant addresses the requirements given in the examination items."
- Deployment — refers to "the extent to which the applicant's approaches are applied to all relevant work units and activities given in responses to the examination items."
- Results — refers to "outcomes in achieving the purposes given in the examination items."

There were several aims involved: first, to explore the appropriateness of the dimensions and their effectiveness; and second, to decide if there were any special considerations involved when applying the dimensions to a college or university.

Approach

The general feeling among respondents was that "approach" is what we do well. Our strength appears to be related to our ability to describe our methods, our procedures, our approaches. Nonetheless, every respondent who offered praise, offered faint praise. In virtually all instances, there was a disclaimer that was used to qualify the response. The following examples are illustrative (emphasis added):

> *We can write beautiful rhetoric about approach and then everyone goes about business as usual.*

> *We have some good approaches but we lost points in approach/deployment because we don't have systemic ways of doing things. We do things, and we do them well, but the next time we do them . . . who knows.*

> *We are good at describing our approach, but the data used to get us there are anecdotal.*

The first two quotes focus tightly on that aspect of "approach" concerned with the "degree to which the approach embodies effective evaluation/improvement cycles." We tend to introduce a program, or design a process, or generate a report — and then walk away from it. If it works, we are quite eloquent in our description. But, according to the respondents, when it comes to improvement — whether it is from fair to good or good to great — our eloquence suddenly wanes.

"Approach" also involves the "degree to which the approach is based upon quantitative information that is objective and reliable." The last quote implies that our approaches are not the logical result of having collected information — say, on customer requirements. Nor do we use other types of objective information — perhaps customer satisfaction data — to inform an evaluation/improvement cycle.

Deployment

There were a number of examples offered by respondents to illustrate the unique problem that higher education faces when attempting to deploy an approach. The following quotation is representative:

> *One of the things we do is latch on to a new initiative and then struggle with deployment. We say: "Well, we think it is really important to work on creating a diverse climate." So we have a vice provost for educational equity. "And we really think it is important to have some response to faculty-staff disabilities." So we have a coordinator for disability services. We create the positions, but we don't spend a lot of time thinking about how to deploy the ideas.*

The obvious question is, Why? Why does higher education struggle in this area? When asked for an explanation, the interviewees' responses fell into two categories: (1) the structure of the institution and (2) the profile of the individual. In the first instance, the belief is that colleges and universities are just poorly organized to facilitate deployment. One respondent said, "Why are we so bad at deployment? I think it is by virtue of how we have organized ourselves. Everything is so loosely coupled — and there is a positive value placed on that." Another commented, "At Motorola they cascaded it down through the organization. Everyone was brought on board at the same time at a certain level. Then they went to the next level. With our institutions, the governance is both centralized and decentralized, it's just not clean."

Obviously, structural divisions create communication barriers, which, in turn, work to inhibit the diffusion of ideas across functional areas. One particularly insightful observation was as follows: " . . . academic and administration activities are often not related when we discuss (or score) our institutions. Many colleges focus only on administration, for example, and never tackle teaching and learning. How do we make our organizations whole?" In addition, there were numerous references to the types of people who inhabit our institutional cubbyholes. For example: "Our belief is that the way to operate a university is to bring together a large number of entrepreneurs and just let them do their thing." Whether or not we purposefully hire entrepreneurial types or whether — given our highly fragmented structure — we encourage or reward their individualistic ways, was not addressed. Suffice it to say,

however, the combination of entrepreneurial types in a loosely coupled system makes the deployment of a particular approach a significant challenge on a college campus.

It should also be noted that, in several instances, the respondents provided the answer to the unasked question "How do you know if you have deployment problems?" The answer is "pockets of success." The pockets of success that were referred to by respondents are a logical manifestation of the inability of an organization to apply approaches to "all relevant work units," as described in the Baldrige.

Results

Again, results refer to outcomes in achieving stated purposes. It follows that the inability to deploy an approach will negatively influence the ability to produce an outcome. One respondent expressed the idea as follows: "I think a critical thing in doing a Baldrige assessment on a college or university is to look for deployment and implementation — and then to follow that thread all the way through in seeing if there are results they can report and if, in their minds, they can relate the results to the actions they took." He went on to add, however — "In many cases there is absolute denial between any kind of program or action and the given results. That's going to be a huge task." This last sentence echoed many other statements such as: "In terms of results, we just have a lot of work to do" and "We've never really had to get serious about results anywhere. We've never really had to report a score."

An interesting observation is that there were no references to the notion of "you can't measure what we do." This, of course, is standard fare when discussing performance evaluation and assessment in higher education. There is no doubt that measuring automobile defects is considerably easier than measuring outcomes related to a degree in English. Still, the inference that can be made from the responses provided in the interviews is that, while difficult, it can be done. Results can be measured. We just haven't had to — or wanted to — do it.

VI. Framing the Issue

One of the questions that was asked of the respondents was: "The Award Criteria Framework connects and integrates four basic elements: driver, goal, system, and measures of progress. Comment on the logic of this Framework for your campus." There was general agreement that the Framework can and does model the work of an organization — including the work of a college or university. "I think it's accurate. The picture has a lot of merit," is how one person put it. Another respondent stated, "I like it. The thing I like about it is that it is such a beautiful picture of what could be."

There does seem to be two problems, however; both of which have been mentioned before. First, a number of people alluded to the notion of leadership as the driver of the system, especially as it is referred to in the Framework — "senior executive leadership." A typical remark was as follows: "We got into a discussion on this issue. Our definition of leadership is broader than the president and those who report to the president — e.g., the chair of the faculty senate. So, if you define the leadership broadly enough, then it fits." Another individual put a slightly different twist on the issue by asking the question, "If leadership is the driver of the system, then what is leadership in higher education?" She then added the twist by answering her own question, "I can make the translation that the leadership is the president and the vice presidents, but they don't implement the core process — so, I don't know whether the Framework works for higher education." Clearly, the issue of faculty governance does not fit well with the industrial notion of "senior executive leadership" as the driver of the system.

The second problem is the goal — "customer focus and satisfaction." The value "customer-driven quality" is one of ten expressed values; the criterion "customer focus and satisfaction" is one of seven criteria. And the problems with each have been noted. Nonetheless, for those who reject the idea of "customer," the Baldrige Award Criteria Framework must be particularly galling. The picture tells it all. Leadership drives the system. Then measures of progress are used to ascertain how well the system is performing in fulfilling its goal — customer focus and satisfaction. ◊

VII. Tough Challenges and Winning Concepts

The final part of the interview guide asked the participants to reflect on the pros and cons of using the Baldrige as a means to improve the performance of colleges and universities. Themes emerged in each area — that is, five "cons" that act as tough challenges to the road ahead and five "pros" that could prove to be winning concepts for higher education.

The Cons

Death by Assessment

The message was subtle but also very clear — this stuff will kill you. Our plate is full of assessment-type exercises, accountability requests, and learning opportunities. There is regional accreditation and specialized accreditation. There is program review. There are the state and local requests for data, ranging from crime statistics to graduation rates. There are "report cards" and ad hoc studies on such issues as faculty productivity and program duplication. If the institution is pursuing the use of quality principles, there is an emphasis on organizational learning and professional development: seminars, workshops, reading assignments, projects teams, and so on. There is also a new emphasis on sharing and benchmarking, which manifests itself in consortia membership and responding to external "requests for information."

It follows that the statement by one respondent — "People feel as though they are assessing themselves to death" — should not come as a complete shock. All of the aforementioned activities are heaped onto the plate, piled high with things we are requested to do or that we are inspired to do. At times, it must seem as though there is no time left for doing our regular jobs. And then along comes the Baldrige.

The hard smack of reality is as follows: there must be a way to leverage the time and energy devoted to a Baldrige self-assessment. The possibilities include using a Baldrige self-assessment as an accreditation self-study or using it to reduce the many scattered requests for data from governing boards and state agencies. If we can't leverage our time, then the following scenario may portend the future of the Baldrige in higher education: "If you don't weave it into something else that you are doing, so that it replaces something else, I don't think people will be willing to do it. Between program reviews and accreditation, if we can't weave it in, it's going to die."

Decentralization as Religion

This is a huge challenge. The effects of decentralization can be seen throughout this study. When we spoke to the issue of leadership, as a value, a criterion, and as the driver of

the system, it was mentioned how difficult it was to exercise transformational skills in a loosely coupled system. When "partnership development" was discussed, it was noted how foreign the concept of collaboration was to the barrier-rich culture of higher education. And perhaps most importantly, there was the scoring dimension — deployment. We often have pockets of success but no way to diffuse those successes. These are the effects of decentralization.

The following quotes speak well to this challenge:

> *We realized that while a lot of good things go on here, a lot of it is decentralized, ad hoc. And so it is very difficult to describe it from a university perspective. We can say we do assessment. But each department assesses something different. We do student evaluations, but each department has a different policy. It's done because we have very good people here, not because we have good systems in place that ensure that we are all reading from the same page.*

> *We don't think in cross-linkages. We can think collegially when working on a task force. But in an on-going way, in the crossover and sharing of information, that's tough. A variable or function that cuts across units is a problem. There are few rewards in an academic culture devoted to collectively improving those processes.*

When question marks are placed next to the two areas of leadership and deployment, it shakes a substantial portion of the Baldrige foundation. Of course, the problems associated with decentralization have been discussed in higher education for years — the Balkanization of the disciplines, the deconstruction of the curriculum, and so on. So there is nothing here that should be surprising. From the perspective of someone who is attempting to use the Baldrige to bring systematic change to a college or university, decentralization or loose-coupling is a source of extreme frustration. Nonetheless, there is a flip side to this coin — To what degree is tight-coupling something to aim for? One respondent, in particular, reflected on this topic: "If you have your approach, do you need extensive deployment? Can it happen one way in one area, and another way someplace else. Is that okay?" He continued: "Should it all happen the same way everyplace? Should we be checking up on that every two months? 'Are you doing it the way we said you should be doing it? Or are you changing it to meet your individual circumstances?' We don't do that. But should we?"

And the Winner Is?

There was some sentiment that the award dimension of the Baldrige could have a negative impact in the environment of higher education. "Where I am concerned is the competitiveness of it — the prize," is how one individual stated it. Another response was: "It could be a dysfunctional kind of tool if people are running around trying to get the award."

Still another individual said that he kept running into an anti-prize sentiment on his campus. The attitude, as he described it, was — "'What, are you trying to get some kind of prize?' They didn't understand, or didn't want to understand, what the real value was. So we got quite a bit of flak."

This is an interesting challenge. Certainly the Baldrige's greatest value is as a self-assessment instrument. Still, the Baldrige is a quality "award." In industry, there has been tremendous value in gaining the prize — employee morale, public relations, and so on. There is also a beneficial impact to the greater corporate world, since Baldrige winners are obligated to share their "world class" systems and processes. Educators, in contrast, have a decidedly more cynical view of competition. Colleges or universities also tend to view themselves in egocentric ways — they are "unique" or "special" and believe they have little in common with other institutions.

The result is a positioning problem for the Baldrige in higher education. Before the fact, our cynicism drives us to challenge the need to engage in any activity that might be construed as competitive in nature; after the fact, our egocentrism ensures that we will dismiss any inclination to learn from the winners.

But Words Will Never Hurt Me

It is a saying that every school kid knows, mainly because they have probably had to use it on more than one occasion: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Unfortunately, while the simple epigram has withstood the test of time on the schoolyard, it does not travel so well. From the schoolyard to the college campus, words take on a unique capacity to inflict damage. In fact, one word, "customer," is enough to cause high blood pressure in grown men and women. This is a major concern for higher education institutions interested in using the Baldrige, because "customer" language permeates the Award — in the values, in the Criteria, in the items, and in the Framework. Indeed, recall that the problem statement that emerged from the responses to the core values and concepts was: "How do we minimize the language difficulties that swirl around the word 'customer,' while aggressively pursuing the concept of *customer*?"

While "customer" is by far the most provocative word, the linguistic challenge extends far beyond it. A useful illustration was provided by one respondent:

> *[A language problem] becomes a major detractor when you spend more time talking about language than talking about continuous improvement. A good example of the problem: In category 6 they talk about the certification of suppliers. Now that language doesn't readily transfer. If you think of our suppliers as K-12, we are not out there trying to certify the quality of incoming students; in fact, given the mission of the college, we wouldn't necessarily be looking for the best students from the best high*

schools. We look for students that have potential and can be developed. So, on the one hand, that language doesn't seem to fit; on the other, we want to have a conversation with K-12 to better articulate our needs.

Language problems cannot be dismissed. One reason is that language helps to define a culture. It is for this reason that many people in higher education have a knee-jerk reaction to anything that hints of bizspeak. The Baldrige — and its history as an industry award/audit tool — brings a lot of linguistic baggage to the college campus. Perhaps some believe if they lose the language war, they will lose the territorial war. Others may simply believe that if we use the same words as others, we will lose our distinct place or uniqueness in society.

The second problem is equally perplexing. At times, such as with the K-12 supplier quotation above, the language difference is more than just verbal jousting. It really does *suggest* a fundamental division. If such differences are not ultimately addressed, they will eventually undermine the validity of the Baldrige as a useful framework for improving the performance of colleges and universities.

Quality by Design

There are numerous different ways in which "quality," as a term, is used in organizations. It is used as a vague expression of general excellence — "Quality Is Job One" is the expression at Ford; "Quality to the Highest Degree" is the expression at the University of Redlands. The term can also be used in conjunction with a characteristic — say, the rate of postoperative wound infections for a hospital. According to the *U.S. News & World Report*'s issue on *Best Colleges*, a quality characteristic is the amount of money allocated to instruction per student. Further, there is quality of conformance. Six sigma is the conformance standard at Motorola. In higher education, the various accrediting associations set performance standards. The notion of quality, therefore, is well developed on a college campus. Any particular college or university can purport to be of high quality if it: (1) believes it and says it a lot; (2) has a significant endowment, lots of infrastructure, and has a stiff tuition; and (3) meets the minimum standards for regional and specialized accreditation.

The Baldrige is based upon a different type of quality — quality by design. This use of the term suggests that quality is the degree to which a class of products or services satisfy the requirements of the customer. As such, it is something that can be designed into the processes that deliver those products and services; and it is something that can be continuously improved.

The kind of quality that the Baldrige emphasizes is preferable for many reasons, one of which was described as follows:

The demonstration of student achievement is a major category for North Central.

Colleges and universities are now very concerned about how they can show what level of student achievement they are able to produce. Unfortunately, what they are doing is just end-of-line inspection. They are pulling off-the-shelf assessment instruments and giving mid-point and end tests. Those instruments don't really capture what is going on. So, the Baldrige is better in terms of approach, deployment, and results — and because it forces you to think about the input, the process, and the output. Most accreditation approaches focus on inputs and outputs and miss the process in between.

The problem is that quality — Baldrige quality, that is — takes a lot of work. The culture of the college campus already has a way to think about quality: self-described excellence, resource accumulation, and accreditation standards. These are straightforward and well accepted. Why would anyone want to pursue a kind of quality that is difficult to understand and even more difficult to do?

The Pros

In addition to these challenges, there are also five winning concepts that emerged from the Academic Quality Consortium interviews.

The Big Picture

The Baldrige Award Criteria Framework is a picture — a big picture. It describes the institution as a system with interconnecting parts. Unfortunately, most people in most organizations never experience this helicopter view of their professional work. The more common view is constrained by the four walls of their office, a limited set of duties enumerated in a job description, and the reporting lines detailed on the organizational chart. As has been described, colleges and universities act as if Newton were God and the principles of reductionism were the Ten Commandments.

Consequently, one very positive outcome of colleges and universities using the Baldrige is a new appreciation for holistic thinking. At one institution, for example, each of the 28 items was assigned to an individual. The team then worked together at the criterion level to integrate their findings. "They got tremendous insight into how the university was connected," was the conclusion. "They could step out of their own pigeonhole. For instance, they even saw that the top leadership was struggling, that they didn't have some smug plan they weren't sharing. It was kind of an eye opener." Several other respondents voiced a similar sentiment — everyone seems to benefit from seeing how the discrete parts connect with one another.

That benefit was particularly profound when it came to developing a more integrative look at academic processes. For example: "Instead of trying to use the Baldrige on the

administrative side and then see how it fit on the education side, we asked ourselves 'What are the informing principles and assumptions on the educational side? And how does that fit the administrative side?' We generated an integrated view across the college because the Baldrige gave us a common framework."

Again, our organizational structures, management styles, and rewards systems reinforce decentralization, isolation, and the little picture. The result is suboptimization, redundancy, and waste — and all the inevitable problems that accrue to an organization in which the right hand has no idea what the left hand is doing. The Baldrige, according to the respondents, presents an alternative view — a whole, not parts; systems, not functions.

One Voice

As just described, one of the most important aspects of the Baldrige is its "systems" perspective. It forces individuals to think about the big picture. The Framework is a visual representation of how the system is driven by leadership to generate quality and operational results. Moreover, we have discussed how difficult it is for college and university personnel to think holistically because of the way work processes have been sliced and diced, and the way the disciplines have been fragmented. In effect, each department and office has "stonemason" responsibilities written into the job duties of each of its members: the college of arts and sciences expects its members to defend the sovereignty of the college; the walls between economics and business are built high so that business is not confused with economics or economics with business. In some instances we have advisory boards that are populated with people from government and industry, but we feel the need to remind them that we are special — and the things that they do don't really apply to us. Our barrier-building capacity extends to our institutions as a whole. We are taught to think that a research university has nothing in common with — and, consequently, nothing to learn from — a community college.

The use of a specialized lexicon helps to make such reductionism a reality; so it follows that the use of a general lexicon would help to make systems thinking a reality. Numbers of respondents, in effect, made precisely this point. "It was one of the few times that I can ever remember a group — there was an English professor, the Dean of Business, the President — having a meaningful conversation," is how one person put it. Another respondent said: "If I heard the word *deploy* once, I heard it a hundred times in the course of a month. In my previous years here, I can count on one hand the number of times anyone on this campus ever used the word." And a final summary comment: "The Baldrige's greatest value may be in giving us a common language to speak with one another."

Counterattack!

The area of the academic enterprise that has shown the greatest growth over the last

decade is institutional research — one-man operations have been transformed into offices headed by directors and staffed with computer specialists and data analysts. Some of the growth is called for, most of it is not. A significant portion of the new resources, unfortunately, has been devoted to answering questions that someone else is asking. It has been devoted to collecting data to satisfy external agencies' perceived need to force colleges and universities to be more responsive. This drive to make institutions of higher education more accountable is a simple reaction — "If they won't do it themselves, we will do it for them." The result is "report cards," state-mandated assessments, and numerous studies that seek to identify statistical outliers via methodologies that compare peer institutions.

The adoption and use of the Baldrige as a self-assessment instrument could shift the locus of control in higher education back onto the college campus where it belongs. The following statement captures this sentiment:

> *In light of the conversations and debate that have gone on in the last few years, I kept circling the words "improve the performance" everywhere they appeared — and wrote "internally or externally?" Externally there has been a movement to judge, rate, and improve higher education. Internally there has been the assessment and quality movements. So, the question when it comes to performance improvement is, "Where and by whom?" There is a real push and pull, just like the regulations for student aid. Those regulations were not intended to apply to four-year, degree-granting institutions. They were intended to speak to proprietary school problems. Now all of us have to live with them. The Baldrige might be the same. If we don't claim ownership, someone else will.*

A Methodology for Learning

"Learning" emerged as a dominant theme in the interview responses. Indeed, the following statement was repeated, with only minor variation, in half of the interviews: "[The Baldrige] asks the right kind of questions. It forces you to think about things you don't think about otherwise."

But what does this mean, precisely? Again, from the interview data, there appears to be two dimensions associated with "asking the right questions." First, the Baldrige forced the institutions to practice assessment-as-learning. For example, one respondent stated, "We keep looking for a way to assess the progress we have made. We keep looking for a way to bring those units on board that have been less than enthusiastic. We keep looking for ways to respond when people say, 'Well, we are already doing it.' I see the Baldrige as a mechanism to assess how well they are doing what they say they are doing." Another respondent: "It facilitated us thinking about the data needed for planning, for measuring and tracking our performance, and for achieving our goals. It forced us to learn."

The second dimension was honesty. The implication that comes from suggesting that the Baldrige asks questions that foster learning is that colleges and universities also ask a lot of questions that do not foster learning. Indeed, a number of respondents took direct aim at accreditation: "Unlike accreditation, [the Baldrige] facilitates you taking an honest look at the institution" and "As a steering team, we decided it was a much better way to assess our progress than any traditional accreditation instrument." Perhaps the best analogy is that accreditation is like dating someone (looking and acting our best for snippets of time), while a Baldrige self-assessment is like living with them — all of a sudden the "real you" is exposed.

Checklists and Codfish

Finally, there is one additional "winning concept" that should be mentioned. While the Baldrige can be seen as a general methodology for learning, it also has a number of motivational uses. For example, several respondents were concerned that the use of the Baldrige could become overly compulsive. One expressed her concerns as follows: "I don't know if the university as a whole could apply it in a strict way. I don't know what we would gain from that." But she went on to add: "Our effort helped point out weaknesses for us — one was in the area of customer focus and satisfaction. That's been helpful because that's what we focused on this year." Another respondent made the point even more forcefully:

> *For us, it is at least an extremely helpful checklist of 28 items. It just may be too systematic and too intracomponent-linked to work in the kind of ganglion organism called a university. The Baldrige's best contribution could be as a not-too-compulsive checklist — how are we doing in this area, how about over here? But if you try to draw it together too tightly. . . .*

In addition to using the Baldrige as a checklist to inform specific reallocations of time, energy, and other resources, it also can be seen as an instrument of change. By that I mean it can incite discontent with the status quo. Perhaps the best way to explain this concept is by retelling a famous Tennessean story that was told to me by one of the anonymous respondents. It seems that an East Coast company was in the business of raising and shipping codfish. They experimented with several different ways of shipping the cod. They tried frozen. No luck. Then they tried shipping them alive in tanks of sea water on flat bed trucks. The taste was better, but still not like fresh-caught fish. Finally, out of desperation, the company put a single catfish — the codfish's natural enemy — in the tank. The result? It was like the fishing boat had docked in Kansas. A seafood delight. The moral? Sometimes you need a little tension in the tank to get real improvement.

Feel free to substitute "Baldrige" for catfish, "college or university" for tank, and "improved student learning" for fresher-tasting cod. ◊

VIII. Methodology

An interview guide was sent to nine institutions that submitted case materials to the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award office. Telephone interviews — lasting from 45 minutes to one hour — were held with those individuals most intimately involved in the project. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. A textual analysis was performed in order to identify themes and reinforcing quotations.

Below are the list of interviewees, including which criterion(a) each investigated, and the interview guide.

Interview List

Sue Staas	Delaware County Community College	Criteria 3, 5
Tim Gilmour	Georgia Tech University	Criterion 3
Louise Sandmeyer	Penn State University	Criteria 1, 3
David Haddad	Miami University	Criterion 1
John Harris	Samford University	Criterion 5
Kathleen O'Brien	Alverno College	Criterion 4
Bill McEachern	Alverno College	Criterion 4
Dennis Crowley	St. John Fisher	Criterion 1
Bruce Gildseth	University of Minnesota/Duluth	all
Susan Hillenmeyer	Belmont University	all

Interview Questions for AQC Participants in the Baldrige Project

- To which Criteria did you respond? What steps were involved? — e.g., Who was involved? Over what length of time? How did you accumulate the information? What type of involvement did you have with the Baldrige prior to the project?

- Please discuss how the core values of the Baldrige apply to your institution (take a moment to review the full descriptions from the Criteria booklet):
  Customer-driven quality — Quality is judged by customers.
  Leadership — An organization's senior leaders must create a customer orientation, clear and visible quality values, and high expectations.
  Continuous improvement — Achieving high levels of quality requires a well-defined approach to continuous improvement.
  Employee participation and development — Improved performance depends increasingly on the skills and motivation of employees.

Fast response — Faster and more flexible response to customers must be a critical requirement of everyday operations.
Design quality and prevention — Costs of preventing problems at the design stage are lower than costs of correcting problems "downstream."
Long-range outlook — Achieving quality requires that an organization has a strong future orientation and a willingness to make long-term commitments.
Management by fact — A modern organization needs to be built upon a framework of measurement, data, and analysis.
Partnership development — Organizations should seek to build internal and external partnerships to better accomplish their overall goals.
Corporate responsibility and citizenship — Corporate responsibility refers to leadership and support of publicly important purposes.

- What special problems or insights did you gain from responding to the Criteria on your campus? Discuss any specifics — e.g., point values, item description, notes, language.

- There are three scoring dimensions: approach, deployment, results. Given your responses to the Criteria, how appropriate are these dimensions in the evaluation process? How effective? Are there any special circumstances that higher education faces when it comes to performance evaluation?

- The Award Criteria Framework connects and integrates four basic elements: driver, goal, system, and measures of progress. Comment on the logic of this Framework for your campus.

- In a general sense, what would be the pros and cons of using the Baldrige as a means to improve the performance of colleges and universities in this country? ◊

IX. Addendum

In November of 1994, those Academic Quality Consortium members involved in the Baldrige case study met to review this Report. The following is a series of ideas and flip chart notes — grouped into different topic headings — compiled by the group as they reflected on their Baldrige self-assessment.

Beginning —

- Baldrige is not necessarily the best place to begin a quality journey [meaning that you need some groundwork in the application of quality principles before you engage in a self-assessment].
- There needs to be a plan in place to write a Baldrige self-assessment — then double the time line.
- It's useful to already have a strategic plan in place.
- Need to begin with the problem of "Who is your customer?"
- Start with 7.1 [Customer Focus and Satisfaction].
- It may have an evolution of purposes — a checklist initially, a continuous improvement plan eventually.

Communicating —

- Communicate to the campus that this is a way to build improvement knowledge.

Leading —

- Leadership understanding — not just buy-in — is critical [this gets to the issue of establishing real commitment among senior leadership].
- A Baldrige champion is needed [not necessarily the president or chancellor].
- Unless top leadership pushes this, other offices can't accomplish it.
- To get it done the first time, someone in leadership has to be persistent, even stubborn.

Hurdling —

- Recognize the tension between a Baldrige (comprehensive, linear) approach to organizational learning and your institution's culture.
- Absolutely keep in mind — this is a ten-year effort.
- The concepts of approach/deployment/results is difficult in higher education. Always a lack of deployment.

Linking —

- If there are experts in the business community, ask them for help as readers.

- If thinking in terms of a school or college within a university, then look at linkages with the rest of the university as "supplier relationships."
- Tie in with other initiatives so it is not seen as a separate activity. It can be used to improve an area — for example, human resources.
- Be careful when tying into accreditation. They are different models.

Avoiding —

- Don't write a category by yourself. Extend the ownership by getting others involved in an organizational learning process.
- If it doesn't help add value, don't do it.

Needing —

- You need a comprehensive view of the relationship of customers, staff, and so on. This may be something that evolves as you proceed.
- Need to have someone clearly write into the self-assessment where the linkages are among the criteria.
- Develop Baldrige expertise on campus. Bring experts in to help.
- Faculty understanding is useful, too.
- Need to use your process-mapping skills in preparation for Baldrige.
- There is value to a stakeholder approach, with each category having one.

Several of the institutions participated in state awards. The following notes are reactions to their experiences.

Valuable Learning —

- The second time around, higher score. You can see progress.
- Internal review of the whole application paid off in shared knowledge of quality effort.
- Experience contributed to more people thinking about what would be needed during the year.
- Task is to design a process to complete application such that it leads to organizational learning.
- Beats the heck out of the accreditation process [as a learning framework].

Site Visit —

- Site visit questions were very trained on criteria.
- No matter how rigorous, a self-assessment does not produce the payoff that a site visit does.

Process Payoff —

- After first year, people moved to more process orientation.
- Process focus really emerged. Not just "What are the results?" but "How did we do that?" and "How can we improve?"

Customer Focus —

- Application developed around stakeholders. What are their "care-abouts?" Who does it better? What is the gap? How do we close the gap?
- Application written with two customer groups in mind: the university's faculty/staff and award examiner team.

Helpful Hints —

- There is a tendency to drift toward areas that are easy to measure: maintenance, food service.
- Process: Primary writer, reader, reviewer — then edited by one person for a "common voice."
- Can use the application as a staff recruiting tool.
- You can really see the value of teams pulled together around categories.

◊ ◊ ◊

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

One Dupont Circle, Suite 360
Washington , DC 20036-1110
ph 202/293-6440 • fax 202/293-0073